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Intellectual Ammunition

Potshots

Next to being witty yourself, the best thing is being able to quote others.
—Christian N. Bovee

Commercials are God's way of punishing you for watching TV.
—Neil Steinberg

Make all your scandals complex and you can beat the rap every time.
—Peggy Noonan

The reputation of Congress is lower than quail crap.
—Alan Simpson

One of the greatest labor-saving inventions of today is tomorrow.
—Vincent T. Foss

Legislatures are mostly creatures of the immediate, not the important.
—William Hauck

As for butter versus margarine, I trust cows more than chemists.
—Joan Gussow

People with insufficient personalities are fond of cats. These people adore being ignored.
—Henry Morgan

I loathe people who keep dogs. They are cowards who haven't got the guts to bite people themselves.
—August Strindberg

The Welfare Reform Imperative

by Larry P. Arnn

Preston Simmons of the Bronx, known to family and friends as "Little Man," was born the fourth of seven illegitimate children. His mother had been on welfare since dropping out of high school in the 11th grade. Her own mother had also begun having babies as an unwed teenager. Little Man's father was absent since the boy was two, and when he had been around, he was abusive and drug-addled.

Little Man's life was not orderly. He went to school when he felt like it. Most of the time, he hung out with his 17-year-old girlfriend and sold drugs. His girlfriend became pregnant with his child, begetting the third illegitimate generation in his family. Attempting to compete with his drug supplier got Little Man killed at the age of 14. His child was not yet born when he died.

In February 1994, four Chicago police officers went to check out a report of drug dealing from a house in the city. They didn't find any drug dealers. Instead, they stumbled onto one of the most horrifying scenes of squalor ever witnessed by human eyes: 19 children between the ages of one and 14 were living in one apartment, unsupervised, amid refuse, roaches, rats, and excrement.

One might guess that extreme poverty played a significant part in what happened to these children, but poverty alone cannot explain their fate. Six mothers lived, or were supposed to live, with them—women who between them collected $4,500 a month in welfare benefits. Needless to say, few of the benefits ever reached the children.

Nor can poverty explain the case of little Elisa Izquierdo. She was found dead, at the age of six, in her apartment on Manhattan's Lower East Side, her body covered with bruises. Her mother was arrested for murder.

Such widely reported stories illustrate the human costs of our welfare policies. The heartbreaking fact of this human suffering has been all but ignored in the ongoing debate about how to reform our current welfare system.

Much has been made of the fiscal costs. Advocates of reform, especially conservatives, have stressed that we cannot afford to keep paying high levels of benefits to increasing numbers of people without raising taxes or cutting back other government services. Though true, that argument fails to take into account the human costs of welfare. For even

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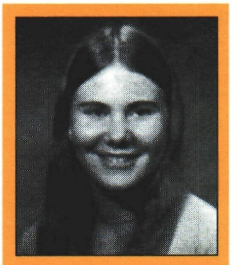

Diane C. Bast *(1978)*
publications director

News from the Heartland

by Joseph L. Bast
Publisher

Welcome!

Greetings to newly elected legislators and officers, and congratulations to those of you who won reelection!

In case you haven't seen previous issues, *Intellectual Ammunition* is a free magazine sent bimonthly to all 8,000 state and national elected officials. *IA* is published by The Heartland Institute, a nonprofit and nonpartisan center for public policy research. With this issue, *IA* begins its sixth year of continuous publication.

Each issue of *IA* features columns by experts at the nation's leading think tanks. Future issues of *IA* will include a 24-page insert, titled *PolicyFax Update*, containing reviews of new research available for free through Heartland's fax-on-demand information service. (More about this appears below.)

Whither Welfare Reform?

Implementing welfare reform will be near the top of the agenda in most states in 1997. The landmark legislation passed by Congress and signed by President Clinton in 1996 properly gives states considerable room to experiment. Will the states be up to the challenge?

Larry Arnn's cover article for this issue of *Intellectual Ammunition* eloquently explains why reform is desperately needed. The most compelling reason is the devastating impact welfare has on the morals, work ethics, and life choices of welfare recipients. Created with the best of intentions, our national "safety net" has led to laziness, a disregard for the value of education and skills training, illegitimacy, and crime.

At the end of Arnn's article, on page 3, is a list of documents on welfare reform available from *PolicyFax*, Heartland's fax-on-demand information system. If you are involved in the welfare reform effort in your state, or just curious to know more about the national reform effort, I hope you will consider ordering one or more of these documents.

Watch for your 1997 PolicyFax Catalog

This issue of *Intellectual Ammunition* is missing its usual insert, titled *PolicyFax Update*, to avoid any overlap with *PolicyFax '97*, which you should receive shortly. The new annual catalog is big—250 pages, with reviews of over 3,000 documents from 140 resource organizations—and contains documents on virtually every public policy issue that an elected official may need to address.

If you are an elected official, a copy of the catalog will be hand delivered to your office along with a letter from one of your colleagues. If you are a journalist, think tank researcher, or member of The Heartland Institute, your copy will arrive by mail.

***PolicyFax* is free for journalists and elected officials.** Just call 847/202-4888 from any touch-tone phone, enter your *PolicyFax* account number, enter the number of the document you want and your fax machine number, and hang up. Your document should arrive in a few minutes. Check the mailing label on the back cover of this issue of *IA* or the card accompanying your catalog for your eight-digit *PolicyFax* account number.

If you are not a journalist or elected official, there is a $5 charge for each document you order through. Have a credit card handy when you place your order.

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if our government could afford to continue on the free-spending path it is now on, it *should not*. And not because we don't care about poor people, but precisely because we do.

Opinion has surely moved in the right direction when a Democratic president is elected on a promise to "end welfare as we know it," and when Congress passes—and that same president signs—a bill that ends welfare as a federal entitlement, the first entitlement program to be revoked in the country's history.

But we must not think that the battle has been won. It will be up to the individual fifty states to decide if and how to change their individual welfare systems. There will be great difficulties in effecting real change, not the least of which being the huge, well-funded, and entrenched bureaucracies that run the various state welfare systems. But great difficulties can be overcome.

What is needed is to destroy the current system, root and branch, and replace it with a system not only more fiscally responsible, but more humane. Welfare as we know it saps the human spirit: It destroys character by creating an incentive to idleness, breeds crime by making men socially irrelevant and economically disadvantageous to women, and consigns whole generations of children to moral poverty by depriving them of the essential benefits of a two-parent home.

There are very few sane people who will choose idleness when the consequence is a life on what used to be called "skid row." Such a life is characterized by scrounging for food, begging for money, and living outdoors. But if idleness is made more attractive by offers of money and shelter, more people will choose it.

Take the case of Lowell, 27, who had worked as the manager of a Burger King while living in a New York City shelter. He quit his job after coming back from work a few times late enough to be locked out of the shelter. "Too much hassle," he said. He got on welfare and continued to live at the shelter. He was in no hurry to leave. "You know what I had for dinner last night?" he asked. "Steak! We have a TV, a video room. I see more movies here than I ever saw outside. You really can't ask for more."

Lowell chose idleness because he could, not because he had to. Did it make him a better person? Not by any standard of human decency or dignity recognized by the civilized world.

There are other, more serious, consequences as well. For every man who chooses welfare over work, there are countless women who choose welfare over marriage. The principle is not different: The current system not only makes welfare more profitable than marriage, especially marriage to low-income men, it also makes having children more profitable than not.

A single, childless, non-working woman is eligible for far fewer benefits than is a single mother. And as to marriage, welfare packages in most states make collecting benefits more lucrative than relying on the income of a husband.

Consider that in California a single mother of two who takes advantage of every program available can collect a tax-free income of $21,804 a year—about $10.50 an hour. A full-time minimum wage job pays half as much. So what is the point of working at one, whether you're a man or a woman? And if you're a woman, what good can come from having a man around?

> *What is needed is to destroy the current system, root and branch, and replace it with a system not only more fiscally responsible, but more humane.*

Let us now consider those who do not *choose* any of this, but who nevertheless feel the brunt of its consequences most severely: children. Children who grow up in single-parent households by definition are deprived of the benefits of being raised by both parents, a mother and a father. With rare exceptions, this means that they grow up without fathers. Instead of having two disciplinarians and moral teachers they have one, and often that one is neither disciplinarian nor moral teacher.

The lesson kids learn from such teachers is that *idleness pays*. This is not to suggest that they learn nothing from men. But most of what they do learn is negative. Many of the men they see in their neighborhoods are either idle or criminals, and the criminals are the ones with the money, the flashy clothes and cars, and the ones who get the most "respect."

Not all welfare recipients are undeserving. But even the deserving, even those who lose their jobs or whose spouses leave them penniless with small children, get sucked in by a destructive whirlpool, a cycle of dependency so powerful it has consigned several generations of people to permanent moral destitution. That is the true cost of welfare, and it is a human cost, not a fiscal one.

The compassionate intentions of welfare advocates have led us to this tragedy. The numbers of those in poverty have swelled right along with the bureaucracies built to administer to them. The poorest and most blighted neighborhoods are poorer and more blighted than they have ever been. And yet every year, government spends more and more money—earned, and indeed earnable only by working Americans—on programs that corrupt not only individuals but the whole society.

True compassion is helping people help themselves, and no one is helped by the culture of dependency. We will not get anywhere unless we squarely face the mess we have created. That requires blunt talk and the acknowledgment of unpleasant truths.

Genuine reform can only come at the state level. It is now in the hands of the states, their legislatures, and ultimately their citizens, to reform the human tragedy that is our welfare system. We must help them take up this task not only in good faith, but also awake to the challenges that lie ahead. Compassion for the next generation of children demands that we take bold action.

❖

Larry P. Arnn is president of The Claremont Institute. This essay is reprinted with permission.

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Did Clinton Deliver on His Promise to End Welfare as We Know It?
#9200106 (4 pp.)

Rethinking the Safety Net
#2428401 (8 pp.)

Welfare Reform at the State Level
#9275201 (8 pp.)

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Crime

Morgan O. Reynolds

Morgan Reynolds is director of the Criminal Justice Center at the National Center for Policy Analysis.

Concealed Gun Permits Deter Violence

Hopeful that permitting citizens to carry concealed weapons will reduce crime, states across the country have implemented new "shall issue" concealed carry laws. Do such laws make us safer?

Texas is a good case study. Before its concealed carry law was passed in 1995, proponents claimed that public safety would improve. Opponents said the Lone Star State would quickly degenerate into a Wild West shooting gallery.

"If you introduce a gun into a violent encounter," Duke University criminologist Philip Cook has said, "it increases the chance that someone will die." Since January 1, 1996, when Texas's new concealed carry law went into effect, 100,000 citizens have acquired licenses—far more than projected—while only 700 applications have been denied.

So far, the crime data from Texas support the claims of gun enthusiasts. Through the first eight months of 1996, Houston murder rates were down 18 percent from the previous year. Dallas murder rates fell 25 percent from the previous year. The evidence is mixed with regard to other violent crimes. Property crimes reported to the police, meanwhile, rose 3 to 4 percent in both cities (at this writing, statewide figures for 1996 were unavailable).

Since Texas's new concealed carry law went into effect, 100,000 citizens have acquired licenses.

At a minimum, the data suggest that the alarmists were wrong about the impact of concealed carry on reckless homicide. The decline in gun deaths, admittedly, might have little to do with concealed carry permits. A five-year prison-building boom in Texas, for example, has raised capacity from 50,000 to 150,000 beds and probably accounts for the lion's share of the crime decline. The willingness of the state to seek and successfully employ the death penalty is a relevant factor too. The Texas crime rate has fallen by nearly 40 percent during the 1990s, to its lowest level since 1970.

But an impressive study from the University of Chicago concludes that concealed carry permits are indeed responsible for a significant national decrease in violent crime and no significant increase in fatal firearms accidents. Economist John Lott and his graduate assistant David Mustard are the first social scientists to scientifically study the impact of concealed carry permits. The crimes most likely to be deterred by concealed handgun laws, conclude Lott and Mustard, involve direct contact between the victim and criminal rather than nonconfrontational crimes like auto theft and burglary.

Contrary to the findings of a widely quoted study by University of Maryland researchers who picked only three cities in Florida and one city each in Mississippi and Oregon, Lott and Mustard used data from all three thousand counties in the United States between 1977 and 1992. Concealed handgun laws, it turns out, reduce murder by 8.5 percent, rape by 5 percent, and severe assault by 7 percent. The Lott-Mustard statistical models are sophisticated and account for many differences among counties, including arrest rates.

The Texas crime rate has fallen by nearly 40 percent during the 1990s, to its lowest level since 1970.

According to Lott and Mustard, there would have been 1600 fewer murders, 4200 hundred fewer rapes, and 60,000 fewer severe assaults if the same state laws to license law-abiding handgun carriers had prevailed throughout the country in 1992. The deterrent effect of concealed handgun laws turns out to be highest in counties with high crime rates. Despite a relatively small number of women with concealed handgun permits, the deterrent impact on rape is comparable to that of other violent crimes.

The Chicago economists figure that the national reduction in violent crime is worth $6.6 billion, while the modest rise in property crimes costs about $400 million—for a net social gain of $6.2 billion.

The Lott-Mustard study has set the disarmament movement back a good ten years, reducing it to emoting and personal smears. The study, which appeared in the University of Chicago's peer-reviewed *Journal of Legal Studies* in January 1997, examines the data in every conceivable way and finds the deterrent effect of armed, law-abiding citizens to be undeniable.

Today, 31 states—representing 49 percent of the population—have "right to carry" laws on their books. Many legislators in those states took a lot of heat for their belief in the benign effects of gun ownership and concealed carry. Now they have solid proof that they were right.

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The Untold Triumph of Concealed Carry Permits
by David Kopel
Evidence appears to indicate that concealed carry laws have not increased violent crime. *(Policy Review, July-August 1996, 3 pp.)*

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Education

George Clowes

George Clowes is managing editor of *School Reform News*, a monthly newspaper published by The Heartland Institute.

Houston May Contract with Private Schools

What's a school superintendent to do when he has serious overcrowding, increasing enrollment, 84 school buildings in need of renovation, and taxpayers who just rejected a $390 million bond issue designed to address those problems?

Houston school superintendent Rod Page considered many options for addressing the overcrowding, including a longer school day, a longer school year, changing attendance boundaries, and using portable classrooms. He settled on a far bolder proposal: paying tuition to send some students to private schools.

> *If there is a private school in the neighborhood, it would be in the children's best interest to go to that school rather than spend two hours a day on a school bus.*

Page's proposal would apply to students who could not attend their neighborhood schools because the schools had reached their enrollment capacities. Those students would be allowed to attend a school run by a "non-district educational provider." The district would pay participating private schools $3,565 per student, 90 percent of the district's per-pupil cost.

Participating private schools would be required to accept the district payment as full tuition for the student, take all students who applied, report attendance to the neighborhood public schools, and administer achievement tests. The district is checking to see if religious schools could participate in the program, so long as students from the public schools were not exposed to religious symbols or teaching.

Page's proposal has not been voted on by the Houston school board, but it already has its critics, including at least one member of the board. Some critics have questioned whether the district is permitted to contract with private schools. Page responds that the board already contracts with private schools at district expense to serve special education and at-risk children. He contends that the contracting he proposes is merely an expansion of that existing practice.

Page appears to be right. Most school districts in the U.S. contract out or privatize at least some of their services, even if tuition isn't normally one of them. A 1995 nationwide survey conducted by *American School and University* magazine reported that two-thirds of the schools that responded contract out a support service, and 40 percent thought they would contract out more in the future. Janitorial, food, and transportation services are the functions most frequently privatized.

Despite criticism, Page's proposal seems to serve the best interests of the more than 2,600 Houston children who were bused last year because their neighborhood schools were full. If there is a private school in the neighborhood that meets the district's standards for quality, "then it would be in the children's best interest to go to that school rather than spend two hours a day on a school bus," the district's chief of staff, Susan Sciafani, told *Education Week*.

Taxpayers, too, would benefit from the arrangement.

Union nixes plan to reward good schools

A program adopted by the Philadelphia school board to link teacher performance reviews and pay raises to student achievement was denounced by the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers as "vindictive" and "school-bashing." The new professional accountability program holds teachers responsible for student test scores, attendance, and graduation rates.

Teachers at high-achieving schools would receive cash bonuses, while others could be dismissed if their students consistently performed poorly. In fact, up to three-quarters of the staff could be replaced at schools that fail to meet performance goals.

Such incentives to improve are clearly in order in the Philadelphia school system. Barely half of the city's students graduate from high school on time, and fewer than one in five are proficient in reading, math, and science.

The school board is budgeted to spend a total of $1.4 billion on the city's 257 schools this year, or $6,511 for each of the district's 215,000 students. It appears to be serious about linking pay and performance. In September 1996 the board concluded that Superintendent David W. Hornbeck had only partially met expectations, giving him a "grade" of 2.7 out of 4.0. Hornbeck did not qualify for a pay increase.

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Parents as Partners

The school board in Lake Travis, Texas wants to contract with private schools in order to ease overcrowding in the district's public schools. A nine-page description of the school board proposal is available through *PolicyFax*.

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Environment

Jonathan H. Adler

Jonathan H. Adler is director of environmental studies at the Competitive Enterprise Institute.

The Stealth BTU Tax

The centerpiece of President Bill Clinton's first budget proposal was a massive energy tax. This BTU (British Thermal Units) tax was estimated to cost $30 billion per year, or over $300 per family of four. Some economists predicted that the tax would eliminate over half a million jobs. Had it been enacted, Clinton's BTU tax would have made it more expensive to heat a home, cook a meal, and drive to work. Such a proposal hardly fit the ideal of "putting people first."

Given its onerous impact, it's not surprising that the BTU tax was a political nonstarter. Within days of Clinton's announcement, senators from both parties made clear that they would not support such a tax. The White House was forced to settle for a 4.3-cent tax on gasoline and other transportation fuels—far below what many administration officials, including Vice President Al Gore, reportedly wanted.

Clinton's BTU tax would have made it more expensive to heat a home, cook a meal, and drive to work.

Energy tax proponents may get a second chance. In mid-1996, Undersecretary of State Tim Wirth pledged that the United States would lead the charge toward "verifiable and binding" emission reductions to prevent global warming caused by greenhouse gases. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions requires, in particular, cuts in carbon dioxide emissions—which, in turn, entails reducing energy consumption. Speaking in Geneva, Wirth said the world must "take urgent action" or face the possibility of environmental Armageddon.

Greenhouse gas emission reductions will not happen by themselves; they will have to be forced. Thus, the Environmental Protection Agency has been reviewing policy options, including the possibility of raising fuel taxes and tightening energy efficiency without congressional authorization.

In November, industry officials uncovered an internal EPA memo outlining how to enact such measures through the administrative process. An energy tax—possibly in the form of a tax on the carbon content of fossil fuels—is a favored method. Stabilizing greenhouse gas emissions at 1990 levels over the next fifteen years—a modest first step according to most global warming alarmists—would require a tax of more than $100 per metric ton of carbon or its equivalent. Industry economists estimate that such a tax would cost approximately $200 billion per year, or well over $2,000 per household. Reducing emissions by an additional 20 percent, as proposed by Germany, could more than double the costs of stabilization, says Gary Yohe, an economist at Wesleyan University. Even were the taxes offset by corresponding cuts in income taxes, the new levy would crimp economic growth.

Yohe suggests that the imposition of energy taxes on this scale would feel like the energy crisis all over again. Industry would take a pounding. Energy-intensive sectors of the economy, including mining, chemical production, and paper, would be particularly hard hit. That has some labor unions, such as the United Mine Workers, worried. "We're looking at ten thousand jobs lost and the extinction of the UMW," the union's Eugene Trisko told the *Washington Post*.

Yet the burdens on industry are only the tip of the iceberg. An energy tax would raise the price of heating a family home, going to work, visiting family and friends, and buying groceries. In short, an energy tax would impact everything.

The imposition of energy taxes on this scale would feel like the energy crisis all over again.

Of course energy taxes are not the only option. Similar reductions in greenhouse gas emissions could be achieved through a 1970s-style rationing system. Such an approach might even incorporate tradeable emission permits. Imposing quotas on utilities and fuel suppliers could reduce emissions without directly taxing consumers. Yet the effect on energy prices would be very similar.

Must global warming policies be so costly? Universal adoption of off-the-shelf conservation technologies might generate some savings, but not much. (Indeed, if energy conservation is so profitable, there would be no need to cry "global warming" at a crowded international conference to get conservation measures adopted.) Ultimately, there is no getting around the fact that "verifiable and binding" emission reductions will impose significant costs, economic and otherwise.

Available on *PolicyFax*

Climate Deal Sets Stage for Global Energy Taxes
by S. Fred Singer
The Global Climate Treaty "is a bureaucratic solution to a phantom problem and a surefire recipe for political mischief." *(Insight on the News, 1995, 2 pp.)*

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Health Care

Michael D. Tanner

Michael D. Tanner is director of health and welfare studies at the Cato Institute.

Beware of Medicare Commission

Patriotism may or may not be the last refuge of a scoundrel, but the last refuge of a politician is almost certainly a commission.

President Clinton, Republican leaders, and almost everyone else in Washington seem to have agreed to place the future of Medicare in the hands of a bipartisan commission. As a general rule, whenever politicians reach this sort of consensus, we should reach for our wallets. The Medicare reform commission is no exception.

Everyone understands that Medicare is in trouble. Already the program is running a deficit, and the most recent estimates indicate that it will be completely insolvent before the end of the century. But does anyone really believe that a commission, appointed by Bill Clinton and a Congress that has grown terrified of offending the senior vote, will undertake the type of reforms necessary to fix Medicare's long-term problems?

Ironically, the politicians point to the 1983 commission that "saved" Social Security as a model for the Medicare commission. But that commission is a perfect example of why we should be worried. Unwilling to consider any truly innovative solutions, that commission fell back on the old Washington standbys: It recommended a huge payroll tax increase, along with some minor benefit cuts. The commission members, all charter members of the Washington establishment, then announced that Social Security was safe for the next 75 years. Of course, they were wrong. Social Security will begin running a deficit as early as 2012.

There is no need for a commission to figure out Medicare's problems. Medicare is fundamentally unsustainable because of three irrefutable facts: demographics, technology, and third-party payment.

First, America is growing older. In 1965, a person who reached age 65 could expect to live an additional 14.6 years. That has now risen to 17.5 years and by 2025 will increase to 18.8 years. As a result, in the next 30 years, the number of Americans over the age of 65 will increase more than 20 percent. The number of Americans over the age of 70 will double. Indeed, Americans age 85 and older are now the fastest growing segment of the population. With medical breakthroughs and new technology, we can expect life expectancy to continue to increase, leading to even greater numbers of elderly.

Second, medical treatments and technologies exist today that were not even dreamed of when Medicare was conceived. Those new treatments and technologies have saved lives and increased the quality of life, but they have also undeniably increased the cost of health care.

Third, Medicare suffers from the problems inherent in any third-party payment system. Numerous studies have demonstrated that individuals will consume more, and more expensive, health care services if someone other than the consumer is bearing the cost. Guy King, former chief actuary for the Health Care Financing Administration, says that third-party payment is one of the primary causes of the rapid growth in Medicare expenditures. As King explains, "When people, either patients or doctors, are spending other people's money, they do not worry about the cost or number of services consumed."

What we need is not a commission, but political leaders who will be honest with the American people—who will tell them that Medicare cannot continue in its current form. We cannot continue to have the government provide virtually first-dollar insurance coverage for every senior. Instead, Medicare should be transformed into a backup catastrophic program that protects seniors from serious illnesses but leaves people increasingly responsible for the majority of their health care expenses.

Medicare is fundamentally unsustainable because of three irrefutable facts: demographics, technology, and third-party payment.

The logical way to accomplish that would be to gradually increase Medicare deductibles—a modest amount in the first year but growing steadily over time. Several decades down the line, the deductibles would be several thousand dollars per year. At the same time, limits on Medicare reimbursements should be removed so that the program would cover catastrophic expenses without limit.

While that transformation is taking place, today's workers should be provided with incentives to start saving to cover their future noncatastrophic expenses below the deductibles. That can be done by expanding individual retirement accounts (IRAs) and establishing medical savings accounts.

These are the types of bold changes necessary to truly reform Medicare. And they can and should be done without a commission.

Available on *PolicyFax*

A Taxpayer's Guide to the Medicare Crisis

by John C. Liu and Robert E. Moffit

"Without significant program changes, the taxes working families will have to pay in the coming year will be enormous." *(The Heritage Foundation, 1995, 6 pp.)*

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Law

Nicole Garnett

Nicole Garnett is a staff attorney for the Washington, D.C.-based Institute for Justice.

NAACP Lawsuit Challenges Vouchers

"It never ceases to amaze me," Justice Clarence Thomas has observed, "that the courts are so willing to assume that anything that is predominantly black must be inferior." Ironically, the Milwaukee NAACP is now asking yet another court to endorse just that assumption.

The NAACP recently interjected itself into litigation involving Wisconsin's groundbreaking school choice program. Ninety-six percent of the students participating in the program are minorities. *The Milwaukee Community Journal*, the city's largest African-American newspaper, found that 90 percent of the black community supports the program.

The NAACP argues that the program violates the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Why would a program designed to benefit poor minority children represent "unequal protection?" The NAACP compares the voucher program to the earlier efforts of southern states to thumb their noses at desegregation by sending white kids to private schools. According to the NAACP, some of the parents participating in the voucher program choose to send their children to "virtually one-race schools," while "racially separate schools are inherently unequal."

Comparing today's predominantly black private schools to the segregation academies in the Jim Crow south insults the intelligence of minority parents across the nation. Inner-city private and religious schools provide a far superior education than their public alternatives. Only 35 percent of the freshmen who entered public high schools in Milwaukee in 1992, for example, graduated in four years. In one school, only 13 percent did so. Compare that abysmal record to that of two predominantly black private schools in Milwaukee: Messmer High School boasts a 98 percent graduation rate; the high school graduation rate for alumni of Urban Day, a K-8 independent school, is also 98 percent.

The success of predominantly black private schools is not the only irony of the NAACP's effort to thwart school choice. Many of the private and religious schools in inner-city Milwaukee are more integrated than their public counterparts, where less than 21 percent of the students are white. Vouchers will further integrate private schools by making them affordable for poor parents. While some black parents use their vouchers for schools that are mostly one race, many others will choose an integrated environment. School vouchers, therefore, would actually help advance the NAACP's goal of integrated education.

Apparently, however, the NAACP is more interested in curtailing poor parents' choices than in promoting integration. It not only wants to prohibit black parents from choosing predominantly black private schools for their kids, but it thinks that they cannot be trusted to select religious schools either. The NAACP's belittling attitude toward black parents is most glaring when it characterizes school choice as "compelled worship." After observing that most religious schools in Milwaukee are Roman Catholic and Lutheran and that most black parents are not, the NAACP concludes that permitting black parents to use vouchers in those schools is tantamount to compelling them to worship there.

This suggestion—that black parents need the state to protect them by limiting their ability to voluntarily expose their children to diverse religious traditions—is a slap in the face for the parents who would choose religious schools for their children. What these parents recognize, and what the NAACP ignores, is that these schools have long records of successfully educating minority students. Contrary to the NAACP's opinion, parents like Val Johnson (a Pentecostal Christian who has sacrificed to send all five of her children to Catholic school) have good reasons for wanting their children in religious schools. Ms. Johnson lists concerned teachers, discipline, and high academic standards among the reasons she selected Catholic schools for her children. Her kids' religious upbringing, she notes, is her prerogative.

> *Why would a program designed to benefit poor, minority, children represent unequal protection?*

The NAACP has a long and distinguished history of fighting for increased opportunities for minority school children. It should wholeheartedly *endorse* reform efforts like school choice, which empower poor minority parents by opening the doors of good schools to their children. Instead, it clings tenaciously to the status quo, claiming despite the abysmal failure of public schools that "African-Americans and other racial minorities especially benefit from implementation of uniformity of educational opportunity by a government official." In doing so, it abandons its legacy and the poor black children that it claims to represent.

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Expanding Educational Opportunities for All America's Children
by Diane Ravitch
A prominent education expert advocates a means-tested school choice program to improve America's education system. *(The Brookings Institution, 1994, 8 pp.)*

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Privatization

William Eggers

William Eggers directs the Reason Foundation's Privatization Center

Private Sector Expanding Involvement in Transit Services

Between 1980 and 1992, the share of local transit subsidies provided by state governments rose from 18 percent to 33 percent. In the future, local governments can be expected to increasingly turn to state governments as federal transit subsidies continue to decline. However, *some* local governments have discovered ways to reduce the cost of providing transit services by using public-private partnerships.

According to an annual survey of the top 100 transit bus fleets in the United States, private contractors operated almost 2,000 more transit buses in 1996 than they did the previous year. This increase came while the total fleet size remained steady.

In Boston, the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) has begun the process of privatizing all of the city's bus transit. MBTA has worked for over a year on a plan to convert itself into a "virtual agency," consisting of just a small policy and planning staff who will monitor contracts with private providers of bus services. The agency currently runs 980 buses and 42 trolleys on 159 routes. Privatizing those services will save a projected $13.5 million in 1997, and approximately $27 million a year thereafter—an 18 percent cost reduction.

Local public transit unions vigorously oppose the MBTA's plan, and the U.S. Department of Labor warned that the plan may violate rules on the use of federal transit funds. MBTA staff argue that contractors will hire between 75 and 90 percent of the agency's bus operators, and that the agency will take other measures to minimize impacts on workers.

Indianapolis has pursued a less dramatic, but still comprehensive, approach to expanding the private sector's role in transit. Paratransit service for disabled passengers was contracted out four years ago. In the first year, the contractor doubled service without increasing the budget, despite absorbing displaced public paratransit drivers. By the end of 1996, the Indianapolis Public Transportation Corporation (Metro) had saved over $5 million due to competition.

Metro pursued a similar course in 1994, when workforce attrition allowed it to reduce publicly offered services and to place ten fixed routes into the competitive marketplace. That contract is expected to save Metro over $2 million by 1999.

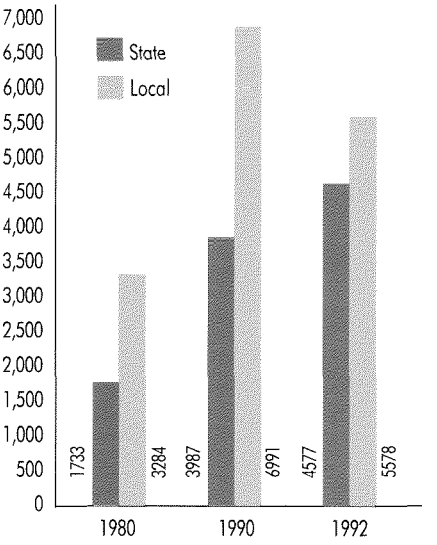
The city's most innovative move, however, came in 1995 when it succeeded in getting state transit subsidies paid to the city rather than directly to Metro. This freed the funds from federal rules that prohibit using funds to contract with the private sector. The city then withheld the funds from Metro, forcing it to cut a number of routes. The city issued proposals for contracts to provide replacement routes, and invited Metro to bid for the contracts against private sector providers.

Metro's drivers agreed to forgo wage increases won in arbitration, pay higher health insurance premiums, and use an overfunded pension to offer early retirement to senior drivers. In return, the drivers received bonuses for obtaining further savings. Those changes allowed Metro to reduce its costs from $66.23 per vehicle hour to $51.45, and the agency won the contract for the replacement routes.

The private sector also has proved able to help cities address special transit problems. For example, city officials in Colorado Springs struggled with how to pay for upgrades to hundreds of bus stops, required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). They estimated that complying with the requirements would cost an average of $1,000 to $1,500 per stop, totaling several million dollars. Faced with scarce funds and tax-and-spending limitation laws, officials sought an innovative way to fund the bus stop upgrades.

Jerry K. Mooney, general manager of Springs Transit Management Inc., explained the city's plan: "We figured it would work best if someone else built the shelters, made them ADA-accessible, and owned them. . . . Without increasing taxes, we've created an opportunity for the private sector to fund ADA accessibility [in] exchange for [space to sell] advertising." Liberty Communications Corporation, which had previously handled the city's bus and bench advertising, won a ten-year contract to build between 150 and 250 bus shelters, and to install 700 new benches at stops that will not be upgraded with shelters. In addition to the upgrades, the city expects to receive at least $10,000 a year more in advertising revenues than it has in the past. Tom Ratteree, president of Liberty, predicts the revenue gain will be closer to $90,000.

State and Local Transit Subsidies
(Millions of 1992 dollars)



Source: Reason Foundation

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The Politics of Privatization
Privatization insights from Indianapolis mayor Stephen Goldsmith, New Jersey governor Christine Whitman, and Philadelphia mayor Ed Rendell. *(Reason Foundation, 1996, 7 pp.)*

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Regulation

Murray Weidenbaum

Murray Weidenbaum is chairman of the Center for the Study of American Business.

"Fair Housing" Laws Violate Free Speech

The imposition of heavy-handed government regulation is not limited to the business firm, large or small. Some of the most onerous rulemaking is directed at the individual citizen. The enforcement of "fair housing" regulations is a cogent case in point. The classified section of a large regional daily newspaper recently provided a real eye-opener.

I checked the real estate pages on a city I used to live in to see how expensive my old neighborhood had become. It took a while to locate the actual advertisements. They were preceded by 113 lines of warning about words and phrases that could not be used in real estate ads. Familiar with government regulation, I expected to be warned against any mention of race, religion, or ethnic background on the part of those trying to rent, buy, or sell a residence.

However, I was not prepared for the paper's statement that "the following terms would be unacceptable in real estate advertising." Potential advertisers were being told, in effect, that even if they took full responsibility for the consequences, an advertisement containing the proscribed language would not be published.

In my naiveté, I expected that extremely bigoted or foul language would have had to be involved to justify this departure from the traditional freedom of the press. Indeed, people of my generation can recall seeing such vile signs as, "No dogs or blacks or Jews allowed" (the actual language was rougher than that).

Today, the proscribed inflammatory words are quite of a different type. They include such "horrible" terms as adult, bachelor, couple, mature, one person, retired, and single. The implication is that if an 80-year-old landlord of a two-unit apartment building prefers not to have youngsters bouncing overhead, he is guilty of discrimination if he advertises his preference.

> *Today, real estate ads cannot include such "horrible" terms as adult, bachelor, couple, mature, one person, retired, and single.*

Unfortunately, the examples that follow in the newspaper's real estate section are even more extreme. Another prohibited description is—to quote from the publisher's notice—"executive (such as a 'large executive home')." I have read that item several times without getting any hint of the awful bigotry involved in describing a building as a large executive home.

Likewise, it apparently is against the law to describe a building as "near St. Mark's." It would seem that the specific location would be a plus to a member of that denomination and thus constitute a selling point. Of course, the advertiser's intent could be even more innocent—just to help prospective buyers find the place by linking it to a major landmark.

In addition, we are not allowed to advertise that a residence is "ideal for a physically fit person." Would not such notice help people on crutches forced to travel in search of a residence only to find out that it involves a walk up several flights of stairs?

The list of inappropriate language was preceded by a warning that other "not so obvious" words have been interpreted by the courts to violate the Federal Fair Housing Act or state and local laws on that same subject. I did not feel much relief when I read the following statement: "This list is by no means complete."

> *In instances like these, we may wonder what happened to free speech.*

By the way, the standard excuse for government involvement in private decision-making—that government funding is involved—is not present in the case of these restrictions on advertising. The censorship of language is not connected to government funding, even assuming that is an adequate justification. This is not a case of governments attaching strings to the largesse that they are providing. The prohibited language extends to all advertising of housing, even if no government money is involved.

In instances like these, we may wonder what happened to the constitutional provision that "Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press. . . ." It is sad, but apparently necessary, for a citizen to urge the press to be more vigilant in maintaining our basic liberties.

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Making Regulatory Reform a Reality
To be effective, the regulatory reform movement must discuss not only the cost of the regulatory state, but also its absurdity and unfairness. *(The Heritage Foundation, 1996, 14 pp.)*

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Taxes

Stephen Gold

Stephen Gold is associate director and director of communications of the Tax Foundation.

Increased Income Means Higher Taxes

With increased prosperity comes higher taxes. The Tax Foundation's annual analysis of the typical American family's tax burden shows overall tax levels increasing for the third year in a row, from 38.1 percent of income in 1995 to 38.4 percent in 1996 (see Chart 1). The continuing increase in tax burden has occurred even though Congress has not enacted any major tax legislation targeting individuals since 1993. Rather, most of the increased burden stems from our progressive tax system. As incomes grow, so does the portion of taxes paid to federal and state governments.

In a recent *Special Report*, "Economic Expansion Leads to Higher Taxes on Median One- and Two-Earner American Families," senior economist Arthur P. Hall notes that the 1996 tax burden level rivals the highest ever. For a dual-income family, the only years in which total taxes as a percent of income were higher than 38.4 percent were 1980-1982. In those years, respectively, the shares were 38.6 percent, 40.6 percent, and 39.6 percent.

In terms of inflation-adjusted dollars, the $21,883 total tax burden that a median-income dual-earner family will bear this year will be the highest ever. Much of the increase in recent years, says Dr. Hall, reflects the progressive nature of the present tax system. In addition, two other tax trends are responsible for the jump in taxes since 1955: the upward trend in state and local taxation and the increase in the federal payroll tax used to fund social insurance schemes. State and local taxes combined have grown, as a share of income, about five percentage points from 1955 to 1996. Federal payroll taxes (individual share only) as a share of total family income have grown about 6.2 percentage points from 1955 to 1996.

To a large extent, as Chart 2 shows, this growth in tax burdens has crowded out other important parts of the family budget, such as saving. (Other items, such as food, are proportionally smaller due to efficiency gains in the marketplace.)

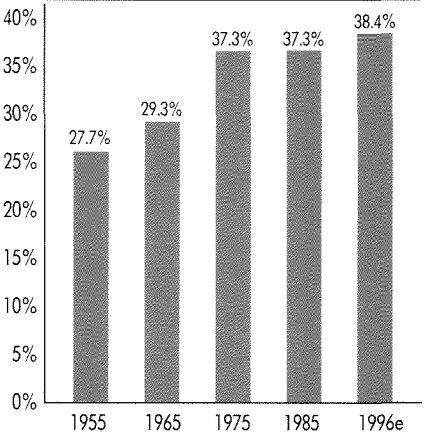
The one- and two-income families represented in the analysis adhere to the Census Bureau's broad definition of family—two or more related people living in the same residence. Approximately 90 percent of the families represented in Dr. Hall's report are married couples with an average of about 1.3 children per family.

To calculate the total tax burden, Dr. Hall computed federal income taxes and payroll taxes directly off the family income. The burden of all other taxes was calculated indirectly using formulas derived from national averages.

The Tax Foundation imputes to individuals the burden of all taxes paid by business.

Chart 1

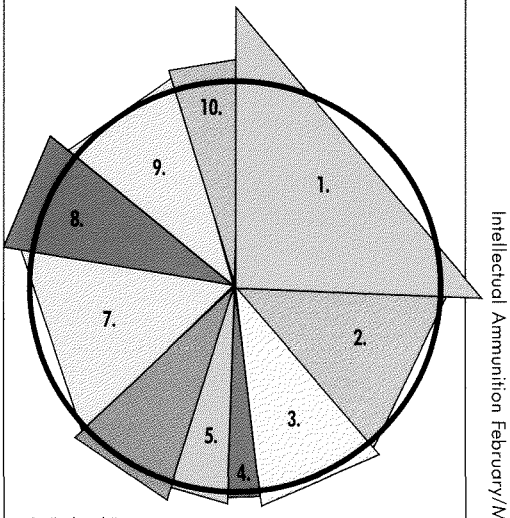
Taxes as Percent of Income for the Median Two-Income Family



Source: Tax Foundation

Chart 2

Representative Budget of Two-Income Family, 1996



1. Federal Taxes	26.7%
2. State/Local Taxes	11.7%
3. Food	9.2%
4. Clothing	3.7%
5. Recreation	4.7%
6. Transportation	6.4%
7. House & Household	15.1%
8. Medical Care	10.5%
9. Other	7.8%
10. Saving	4.2%

Source: Tax Foundation

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1996 Federal Tax Compliance Costs $225 Billion

Rules and regulations for the federal income tax alone account for about $157 billion of that total. (*Tax Foundation, 1996, 2 pp.*)

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Uncovered

Robert V. Pambianco

Robert V. Pambianco is editor of *Organization Trends*, a publication of the Capital Research Center.

What about the Religious Left?

This past year there has been much loose talk about the so-called religious right and the Christian Coalition. In all the clatter there is rarely any mention of the religious left.

But left-leaning churches and religious leaders have been involved in American politics long before there was a Christian Coalition. For years the Reverend Jesse Jackson has asserted that political engagement from the pulpit is an essential part of the church's moral responsibility. In 1988, Jackson's presidential campaign was financed in part with cash donations openly collected in black churches. In 1994, a group of black ministers endorsed Virginia Democratic senator Charles Robb in his reelection contest with Oliver North.

Yet no one seems to mind when liberal religious groups engage in political activities. Left-wing church activists lobby in support of socialized medicine and racial preference programs, and against welfare reform. They organize boycotts against business and agitate for mandates and regulations in the name of "corporate responsibility." Liberal church leaders denounce Republican policies as cruel and un-Christian.

Religious groups on the left engage in the same activism—albeit on a smaller scale—as does the Christian Coalition. The Interfaith Alliance (TIA) is one such group. Its organizers say it was created as an alternative to the "divisiveness and intolerance of the extreme religious right."

> *Left-leaning churches and religious leaders have been involved in American politics long before there was a Christian Coalition.*

The agenda of The Interfaith Alliance is far removed from that of conservative Christian groups, yet its actions are quite similar.

Earlier this year, the Oregon Interfaith Alliance distributed its "mainstream" voter guides to Oregonians prior to that state's special U.S. Senate election. Like the Christian Coalition's guides, they were supposed to provide Oregon voters with the candidates' "positions on important issues." Distributed by the Alliance's network of grassroots activists, the guides covered such issues as the minimum wage, Medicare and Medicaid, the environment, and housing discrimination.

Just what is The Interfaith Alliance?

The Interfaith Alliance, a Washington-based 501(c)(4) organization, bills itself as mainstream and moderate. Yet careful scrutiny reveals that it is anything but moderate.

It is not surprising to discover that this supposedly nonpartisan group was started with Democratic Party money. In 1994, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee provided $25,000 in seed money to the Alliance. Moreover, organized labor, which has committed itself—to the tune of $35 million—to defeating Republican congressional incumbents, has sought to take advantage of the Alliance's voter guides. On August 29 the *Washington Post* reported that AFL-CIO field organizers—deployed to "targeted Republican districts"—have a "special mission": to "persuade preachers . . . to dump the voter guides issued by the Christian Coalition and instead give parishioners literature prepared by The Interfaith Alliance."

> *The Interfaith Alliance's partisan pedigree runs deep.*

The Alliance claims that its voter guides are "fair and honest" and not slanted toward one particular party. But the Alliance frames issues so as to make the final positions taken by the Democratic Party leadership appear more favorable. For instance, who could oppose "supporting families by advocating for a fair living wage," or "child care that protects and nurtures every boy and girl."

Jill Hanauer: Abortion activist and party regular

The Interfaith Alliance's partisan pedigree runs deep and is most apparent in the group's leadership. The staff member who calls the shots is the Alliance's executive director, Jill Hanauer. Hanauer's background is in politics, not religion. A longtime Democratic Party operative, she was a staffer for former Sen. Gary Hart and later worked on Rep. Patricia Schroeder's 1988 presidential campaign. According to *National Journal*, Hanauer raised more than $3 million for the Democratic National Committee before joining the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL) as its political action director in 1990. In 1992 she joined Iowa Sen. Tom Harkin's presidential campaign. All in all, these are hardly the sorts of activities pursued by someone in the mainstream.

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"Progressive" Nonprofits Promote Status Quo
by Daniel T. Oliver
Many advocacy groups believe the time is ripe to promote greater government involvement in philanthropy. (*Capital Research Center, 1993, 10 pp.*)

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Welfare

Robert Rector

Robert Rector is a welfare expert at The Heritage Foundation.

Illegitimacy a Major Cause of Dependence and Poverty

Marriage is dying in America. Last year, roughly a third of all births in the United States were out-of wedlock. The portion of all births that are illegitimate is increasing relentlessly at about 1 percentage point a year.

The most obvious consequences of the rising tide of illegitimacy and declining marriage are welfare dependence and child poverty. The chart shows data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) which contains a national representative sample of young mothers and their children.[1]

The chart divides children into four groups:

- **Out-of-wedlock-Never Married**—Children born out of wedlock whose mother has never married after the birth of the child;
- **Out-of-wedlock-Subsequent Marriage**—Children born out of wedlock whose mother marries subsequent to the child's birth;
- **Within Wedlock-Divorced**—Children born to married parents who later divorce;
- **Within Wedlock-Marriage Intact**—Children born to parents who were married at the time of birth and remained married.

As the chart shows, children born out-of-wedlock whose mothers have not married have received AFDC benefits for 50 percent of the time since birth. By contrast, children who were born in wedlock and whose parents have remained married have received AFDC only 3 percent of the time since birth. Thus, AFDC receipt is 1700 percent more frequent among illegitimate children of never-married mothers than among legitimate children raised by intact married couples.

If a woman gives birth out-of-wedlock but subsequently marries, the average length of time spent on AFDC will be cut in half. Marriage even after an out-of-wedlock birth is thus quite effective in reducing dependence. Conversely, if the parents of a legitimate child divorce, the length of time on AFDC will rise from 3 percent (for intact married couples) to 11 percent for divorced families.

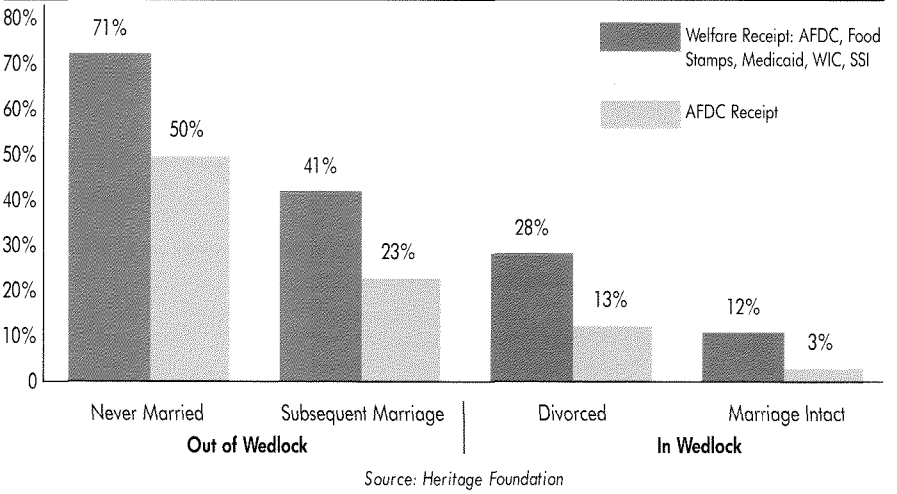
The chart also shows how much time children in the four categories received any of the following means-tested welfare benefits: AFDC, Food Stamps, Medicaid, SSI, and WIC. On average, children in the "out-of-wedlock-never married" group received some form of welfare benefit for 71 percent of the months since birth. By contrast, legitimate children whose parents remained married have received some welfare for 11 percent of the time. Welfare receipt is seven times greater among the never-married group.

For over three decades, the U.S. welfare system has massively subsidized and promoted illegitimacy and single parenthood, with devastating effects on children and society. The recent welfare reform bill began to reverse this pattern with provisions to combat illegitimacy. The primary goal of welfare reform must continue to be saving marriage. Without reversing the current trends and bringing down the number of out-of-wedlock births, dependency will continue to rise.

❖

[1] *The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) contains a nationally representative sample of men and women who were aged 14 to 21 in 1979 when the survey began. In each year, the survey has tracked these individuals, compiling a detailed social and economic history of each, including information on each child born to NLSY women. The youngest NLSY women have now reached age 30; children of NLSY mothers had an average age of roughly nine years at the period of this analysis (1992).*

American Children: Time on Welfare



Source: Heritage Foundation

Available on *PolicyFax*

Marriage in Civil Society
by Jean Bethke Elshtain
The decline in the importance of marriage may be largely responsible for a breakdown in community in America. *(Institute for American Values, 1996, 5 pp.)*

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It's OK to Throw it Away: Tell Your Kids

by Roy E. Cordato

The moral status of recycling has reached that of honoring the flag or respecting your mom. How many of us have been embarrassed by our kids' friends who, upon finishing a Coke, have asked, "do you recycle?" We, of course, sheepishly answer, "no, but we really should." It's time for non-recyclers to come out of the closet.

Rule number one, don't be intimidated by your kids. They have a misplaced sense of moral superiority on environmental issues. Polls show that most information adults get about the environment comes from their kids, who in turn get their views from school and children's television. One poll concluded that 63 percent of school children have lobbied their parents to recycle. Don't roll over. The kids, their teachers, and Captain Planet are wrong.

Kids have a misplaced sense of moral superiority on environmental issues, but much of what they know is grounded in advocacy, not fact.

Much of what kids learn is grounded in advocacy, not fact. For example, one common argument claims we are running out of landfill space. A recent public service ad on Nickelodeon hyperbolically shows images of a city being completely buried in its own trash. This claim is also made in textbooks and popular children's resource books, such as *50 Simple Things Kids Can Do to Save the Earth.*

According to a study by Resources for the Future, if all of the solid waste that America will generate for the *next ten centuries* were put into a single place, it would require a hole that is 44 miles on each side and 120 feet deep. This is a mere one-tenth of 1 percent of the land area of the continental United States. As the report concludes, "there is sufficient land available to continue [our] reliance on landfills."

How about the claim that recycling paper saves trees? Paper is made from trees; if we made new paper from old paper, fewer trees would be cut down. Hence, recycling saves trees. That sounds reasonable, right? Think again. If tomorrow we suddenly stopped making bread from wheat, would you expect there to be more wheat in the world in a year? Or if everyone stopped eating chicken, would we expect the chicken population to increase? Of course not. Farmers plant wheat because it is used to make bread. And if we stopped eating chicken, fewer chickens would be raised and the chicken population would fall.

This same logic applies to the relationship between paper and trees. If we stopped making paper from trees, there would be fewer trees. Eighty-seven percent of the trees that are used for manufacturing paper are planted for that purpose. That implies that for every 13 trees "saved" by paper recycling, there will be 87 that never get planted. This is why, contrary to popular belief, both the amount of forest land and the number of trees in this country have been increasing for the last 50 years. Increased demand for paper has led to more, not fewer, trees.

The claim that recycling saves resources has not been proven. In fact, the market suggests otherwise. A former EPA official, J. Winston Porter, has candidly acknowledged, "trash management is becoming much more costly due to . . . the generally high cost of recycling." If recycling saved resources, it should cost less, not more, than other methods of trash disposal. Costs are a reflection of the value we place on resources. If recycling truly saved resources relative to landfilling and making products from virgin materials, people would not need to be exhorted, and in some cases forced, to recycle. Manufacturers would be willing to pay trash collection agencies (public or private) or consumers an amount sufficient to induce them to voluntarily separate their trash. For the most part (aluminum being a possible exception), this is not the case.

Our children are also told that recycling reduces pollution. But the recycling process itself generates pollution. For example, newspaper recycling requires that the old ink be stripped and the paper be bleached. This is a chemically intensive process that generates chemical waste, as opposed to the benign waste that would result from throwing the paper away. Also, curbside recycling programs require more trash pickups per week. This means more trucks on the road generating more air pollution. *The Wall Street Journal* reported that, due to mandatory recycling, New York City had to add two additional pickups per week, and Los Angeles had to double its fleet of trash trucks.

There is no evidence to support the claim that people who recycle are better citizens or even care more about the environment than people who don't.

There is no evidence to support the claim that people who recycle are better citizens or even care more about the environment than people who don't. For too long, the claims of environmental propagandists, which have trickled up from children to parents, have gone unchallenged. Consequently, we are wasting resources and even generating pollution in the name of saving the environment. So the next time you get the urge to throw that old stack of newspapers into the garbage can, go ahead—guilt free.

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Roy E. Cordato is Lundy Professor of Business Philosophy at Campbell University. This essay is based on one that appeared in the Fall 1995 issue of *The Campbell Entrepreneur*.

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Tax Swap Not Needed to Fund Schools

by Joseph L. Bast

I doubt that I am the only taxpayer who trembles whenever Democrats and Republicans say they'll work together on school finance reform. It looks like just such a "bipartisan" plan to raise taxes will be at the top of Illinois' legislative agenda in 1997.

The problem with school finance in Illinois is not that we spend too little on our schools. Our per-pupil spending and teacher salaries rank very well against other states, and spending has doubled (in real, inflation-adjusted dollars) since 1970. In fact, many communities around the state are spending *too much* for what they get in return: Repeated studies show no relationship between high spending and student achievement.

Isn't it time we started talking about *affordable* education and *getting value* for the dollars we spend on education? Why do we congratulate ourselves (and our schools) when education spending outpaces inflation year after year? We criticized such out-of-control spending when it occurred in health care and other equally important fields.

Yes, Illinois relies more on local property taxes to fund its schools than does the average state. But maybe this makes us *better* than most other states. Giving up this arrangement by "swapping" a higher state income tax for property tax relief would have many disadvantages. For example:

✏ A tax swap would undermine local control and accountability. Studies conducted in other states show that when local control is weakened, student achievement suffers. This is only common sense: Citizens have less reason to closely monitor local school spending if the school is spending "someone else's money."

✏ Reducing reliance on local taxes penalizes those communities that agreed to tolerate economic development or "nuisances" (such as nuclear power plants) that no one else wanted. It rewards "NIMBY" (not in my back yard) attitudes that can cripple economic growth and job creation.

Isn't it time we started talking about affordable education and getting value for the dollars we spend on education?

✏ And what about the windfall that businesses get when property taxes are cut and income taxes are raised? Businesses in Illinois pay 42 percent of total property tax collections; they pay just 14 percent of total income tax collections. Shifting school funding off the property tax and onto the income tax would give businesses a nearly $1 billion annual tax break, at the expense of homeowners. This is a shell game that actually hurts homeowners.

Suburban homeowners also know that increasing reliance on state taxes makes the system less fair to them, because the suburbs get back only pennies out of every dollar they send to Springfield. Most of the tax dollars collected in the suburbs are redistributed to people living downstate or in Chicago, where property taxes are *lower* than in the suburbs. How can that be fair?

There is an alternative to the "tax swap" advocated by Illinois Democrats and Republicans. It is to make public schools spend tax dollars more wisely.

Finally, it is simply not true that the income tax is the fairest source of revenue for the state. Income taxes place a heavy burden on young people with few assets or savings. Isn't it bad enough that we have threatened the future of "Generation Xers" by loading them with our debts? Must we also confiscate a growing portion of their earnings?

There is an alternative to the "tax swap" advocated by Illinois Democrats and Republicans. It is to make public schools spend tax dollars more wisely: by allowing parents to choose the schools, public or private, that their children attend, and by requiring that public funds "follow the student" to the schools their parents choose. Milwaukee, Cleveland, and Vermont already have such programs in place. Pennsylvania is likely to adopt a statewide school choice program in 1997.

If competition accomplished nothing more than keeping school cost increases within the rate of inflation, Illinois taxpayers would save hundreds of millions of dollars each year.

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Joseph L. Bast is publisher of *Intellectual Ammunition* and president of The Heartland Institute. In May 1996 he coauthored with Dr. Herbert Walberg and Dr. Robert Genetski a 185-page report on Illinois school finance reform. An eight-page excerpt from that report, "The Case against a Tax Swap, Summarized," is available through *PolicyFax*. Call 847/202-4888 and request document #2124509.

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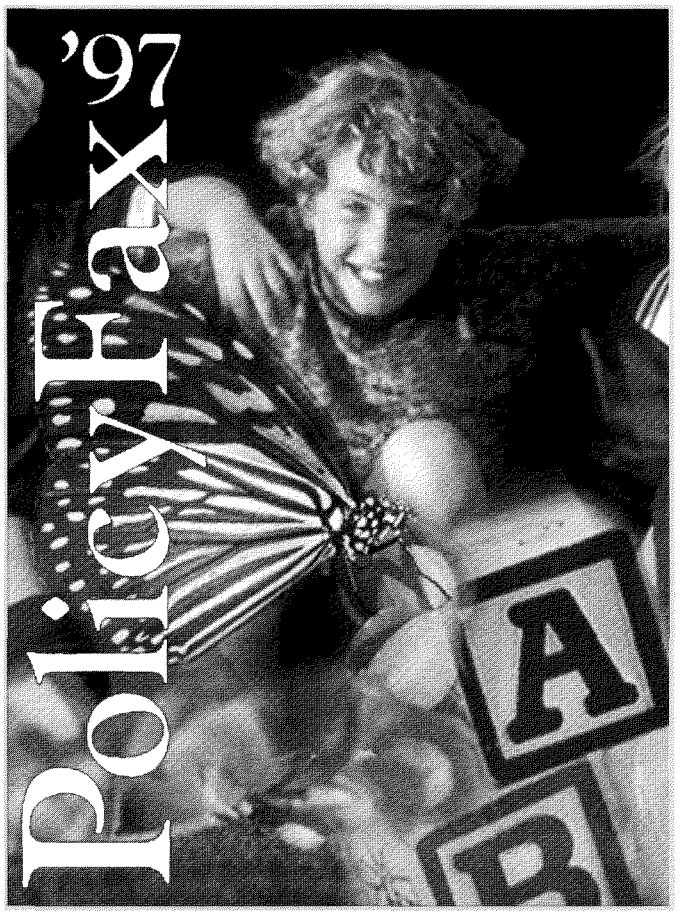

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Where is America Headed?

When most voters, regardless of income, political party, sex, age, or race think something is right, but politicians avoid it and the national media sniff at it with disdain, you know there must be something good about it. Term limits were the biggest political event in 1992 and the success continued in 1994. But the Supreme Court, in a 5-4 vote in 1995, set up a major hurdle to limiting terms in Congress.

Term limits are the best chance to restructure politics and, then, the policies that have done so much to drag down our economy and ruin our children's future.

When President Clinton said he wants a balanced budget, he said he did not want Chelsea's generation to have less than his generation. Apparently he does not know that Chelsea's generation is *guaranteed* to have less. The issue is, can the damage done by the policies of the last several decades be halted and the country turned around, or are future generations headed toward a bleak future? The so-called "Republican revolution" that struck Congress in 1994 has produced very modest reforms. The media trumpet the slight changes in policy as radical, but the changes are so meek as to offer little hope. They slow the destruction but do not reverse it. The main lesson from the recent elections is that term limits are needed to break the gridlock that besets Congress, whether its heads are Democrats or Republicans.

When most voters think something is right, but politicians avoid it and the national media sniff at it, you know there must be something good about it.

A Shining City on the Hill

America has the most amazing history of any nation in the modern world. For most people in the world, America has been, as President Reagan said, a shining city on the hill. Regardless of how others see America, most of us who are Americans do not think of ourselves as living in a shining city on a hill. We lead our lives and get along as best we can. Things could be better or worse for all of us.

In 1980, Ronald Reagan asked the American voters if they were better off than they were four years before, when Jimmy Carter became president. They said no, and they were right. The sad thing is that if you ask if average Americans are better off today than they were 20 years ago, the answer is also no. Despite our great history, recent history has not been kind to America. For over 20 years now we have been in *gridlock*—our political system is wedded to a host of government policies that are causing our economy to spin its wheels.

Is Victory Ours?

The Soviet empire has collapsed and the 40-year cold war has been won. This extraordinary event was not predicted to happen. America faces no major enemy. This now seems old hat. Maybe instant communications have made us immune to the importance of truly historic events. Things that startle us one minute are old news the next day. While the fall of communism in eastern Europe and the old USSR may be old news, this is a great time in history.

The world has a greater chance for more free economies to allow more people to enjoy decent standards of living in democratic countries than ever before. It will not happen everywhere, as the false borders imposed on peoples who do not want to live together are coming apart. But democracy, and the wealth it generates by opening economies, has more chances to happen around the world than ever before. This means that American taxpayers no longer have to bear the high cost of defending the free world. Unless we volunteer to supply police to every trouble spot in the world, we should have more resources to spend on things besides military hardware. We will have more trading partners in a wealthier world. Freedom exists for more people than ever before in history.

While Americans enjoyed the fall of the Berlin wall and wish the peoples of the former "evil empire" well, there is not the kind of joy or prosperity we would have expected to result from such wondrous events. America is not a happy nation; the people sense there is something wrong with our government and its policies that demands fundamental change. The people are right.

No Future in the Stars

Some people think the stars can tell them about the future. Other people think they can foresee the future. We do not know anyone who has ever been good at consistently predicting the future—and we know we can't. So this book is not the story of what is going to happen in the year 2000. We are not predicting a long-run boom or a bust economy because we do not think either is likely. Nor are we as optimistic about what the future holds as we should be at this time in our history.

Our political system is in gridlock. The Republican victory in 1994 is treated by the press as a major revolution, yet few real changes have been made. Fundamentally, we have a big government tied to special interests and entitlement programs that pay something to almost everyone. How we have gotten into this situation is not clear and does not really matter. What matters is how we can get out of the economic rut in which we are stuck. American history has been one of long-run growth that has raised living standards for all citizens. That is not happening in this generation and it looks worse for the next. Unless there are basic changes in our political institutions that will allow our economy to grow again, we Americans will wallow in our own muddle and watch other nations pass us in their standard of living.

Most nations end up in a mess that outsiders can see quite clearly; those in the middle of a mess cannot see it. Telling foreigners how to sort things out and get on the right track is not easy because nations are complicated. We have a hard enough time trying to make our own families work well; trying to make a nation run like a Swiss (or Japanese) watch is a feat no one person or group of persons can do, let alone comprehend.

There Is No Santa Clause

The story we tell in this book outlines the political gridlock that has stopped our gradual march of economic progress. This is not a happy story to tell but is based on our professional lives of studying and writing about political economy. We think most readers will agree that common sense about the economy indicates that we have put ourselves in a situation that can be broken only by significant reform of our political institutions.

This book will not explain how to make America run smoothly. As much as we would like to think that there is a simple answer or

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that there is one person who can make things right, we are old enough to know that there is no Santa and he certainly does not live in Washington, D.C. As Americans, we will either sort out the mess we are in by the rough justice of democratic politics, or we will live in a slowly deteriorating nation.

Breaking the Gridlock

To rejuvenate the economy and provide more opportunities for all, we have to break the gridlock that has made our government resistant to reforming polices that are preventing economic progress. The special interests that dominate Congress will oppose change. Because special interests are organized, well-funded, and know what they are about, we must attack the root of the problem—the perverse incentives that cause good people in politics to go bad.

As we will discuss in this book, politicians understand the gridlock that is choking our economy and preventing imaginative reform in government. These are not issues that can be solved by intellectual debate. Members of Congress are intelligent people who are better informed about problems and possible solutions than almost anyone else. We cannot ask politicians to do things that are not in their own interest—which is reelection for life.

Put the Welfare of the Nation First

Term limitation is a necessary step to change the incentives of members of Congress to think more about the good of the country and less about their next campaign. Term limits are *structural reform* that provide incentives for politicians that are more in keeping with what we want our representatives to be like—people who will govern and then return to live in the society they helped to govern. Only people with no political future are likely to have the political courage to undertake reforms that will tell special interests that there will be fewer goodies. No more taking from Peter, or Peter's children, to pay Paul.

Our political system is wedded to a host of government policies that are causing our economy to spin its wheels.

Term limits are no cure-all for gridlock in government. They are a necessary step to create incentives for politicians to begin the reforms that will take years to undo the damage that has been done. Perpetual budget deficits, the growing national debt, and the Social Security and Medicare debts are monsters. But we can pay these bills—our representatives promised people certain benefits, and we should live up to our promises. We can have government services that most people want. But for these things to be affordable, our economy must grow.

Economic growth means higher standards of living, less poverty, and more tax revenues without higher tax *rates* to cover the bills that have piled up. Economic growth will not occur when politicians who punish economic success are in charge. We must reward the saving, investment, and productive behavior that will provide the resources to get us out of our no-growth economy.

Understanding this does not require genius; politicians know that government must get out of the way for economic growth to occur. It does not happen now because politicians' incentives are the opposite of what they need to be. Currently they are rewarded with long careers in office and control of more and more of the private sector. Term limits allow politicians to connect their legislative actions to their *thinking* on the issues, not their understanding of special-interest dominated campaigns.

What Else?

Some of the reforms in the House of Representatives in 1995 give us an indication of what other reforms should be pushed for to break the status quo that has produced economic and political gridlock. Cut Congressional staffs. Speaker Gingrich fired thousands of House employees. If several thousand more go, from the House and Senate, the old guard bureaucrats who wrote most of our existing horrible legislation will go. Most of these people are Washington lifers who are not in touch with America. The more that members of Congress are subject to their influence, the more likely they are to become a part of the problem. Fresh faces mean new ideas and less concern about long-run comfort in Washington.

The franked mailing privilege should be eliminated. This allows all members of Congress to fill our mailboxes at our expense with election propaganda that are called "Reports from Washington" and the like. Taxpayers have no reason to pay for incumbents' campaigns. Free mailing is another reason it is so hard to blast an incumbent out of office.

Pensions for members of Congress should be zero. If they are paid a good salary while in Washington, that is fine; most must keep a home there and in their home state. But the generous pensions, which allow many to retire at over $100,000 per year, is another reason so many want to stay in Congress so long. They have every incentive to not rock the boat; their main goal is to maximize years in office.

Committee chairs in Congress should have term limits, and election to the chairs should not be based on seniority. Committee chairs are very powerful because they control the flow of legislation that comes before their committees. It is a major reason why reform in 1995 and 1996 was so modest—the ones most opposed to change, the old guard, control the agenda.

House Republicans imposed term limits on committee chairs in 1995. This tells members of Congress—and the voters back home—that there is one less advantage in hanging around in Congress forever. Under the seniority system, voters know that their states get more goodies if they keep their representatives in Congress as long as possible. The good old boy system has been a disaster; let's dump the worst features of it. Most "senior statesmen" of Congress are just the pork kings; they will never support serious reform. The future is too important to leave to them as they cruise toward a cushy retirement.

For the Next Generation

Environmentalists often say that we have a duty not to leave an environmental mess for the next generation. Our point in this book is that we are in an economic mess that is leaving a huge bill for the next generation to face. That bill is into the trillions of dollars already. We must stop adding to that bill and live within our means. We must change the policies that prevent strong economic growth. Growth is the next generation's only hope for any progress. The legacy we are leaving our children violates the basic American sense of fairness.

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Excerpted from *Gridlock in Government*, by Roger E. Meiners and Roger LeRoy Miller (second edition, 1996). Copies of this 150-page book are available for free from The Heartland Institute upon written request. Write to The Heartland Institute, 800 East Northwest Highway #1080, Palatine, IL 60067. You may also fax your request to 847/202-9799 or send it by email to think@heartland.org.

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